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Classified By: (U) Acting Political Counselor Robert Gilchrist, reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) leadership is seeking a closer and more strategic relationship with the United States - this was a central theme of Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi's trip to Washington, D.C. in December 2006. To better assess a possible USG partnership with the IIP, Poloffs held a series of meetings with a range of IIP officials - from senior leadership to new young recruits - to learn about the the party's structure, history, and role in Iraq's changing political landscape. The IIP is well-organized, with branches throughout the Sunni-dominated provinces and a registered membership base of some 50,000 Iraqis. Although it traces its roots to the Muslim Brotherhood, the IIP is moderate relative to other Iraqi Sunni parties and demonstrates a seriousness about governing that many of the Embassy's other Sunni interlocutors lack. However, due to its moderate stances, the IIP acknowledges it has lost substantial popular support which can only be regained via substantial political achievements. The IIP, currently engaging in discussions with parties ranging from Iraqiyah to Hewan to the Sadrists, is likely to be at the forefront of any new moderate coalition-building. END SUMMARY.

Seeking Closer Cooperation with the US

[1](#)2. (C) Senior IIP members in Baghdad welcomed Poloffs' questions about the party, stressing that they want to be transparent with Washington to foster a better relationship. They stressed that Hashimi's trip to Washington, D.C. in December was an important milestone, marking the beginning of what they hope will be a closer and more strategic relationship with the United States. Although the timing of the visit was earlier than expected, the party had been preparing months in advance. In September 2006, Hashimi hired and flew in an Iraqi American political science professor to advise on building strategic relations with the U.S. The party's international relations committee (with a North American relations subcommittee) had been preparing background info on agenda items months in advance. Post-visit, the North American relations continues to be active. In March, the party announced the official opening of an office in Washington, D.C. to help coordinate its outreach and to lobby on the party's behalf. (Note: The new office director was on the scene throughout the Hashimi visit to the U.S., offering the VP advice on how best to approach with his Washington meetings.)

Structure of the IIP

¶3. (C) The IIP has 26 members out of the Sunni Tawafuq bloc's 44 seats in the Council of Representatives (CoR), and holds the majority of committee chairs held by Tawafuq. The IIP has approximately 50,000 registered members. IIP membership was higher right after the fall of Saddam up until 2006, with estimates of members in Diyala alone reaching 45,000, but its numbers have dropped. Deputy Secretary General Ayad al-Samarrai explains the decrease in membership as a result of the general deterioration of security (which prevents normal campaigning activities) and direct intimidation of prospective members by Al Qaeda in Iraq. Samarrai also observed that IIP's numbers dropped as the result of a backlash against the unpopular decisions the IIP has taken - most significantly, its decision to sign off on the constitution and take on government ministries. Many IIP members poloffs spoke to said they expected that party membership would increase again, once the security situation enabled them to resume normal political campaigning.

¶4. (C) Party members at all levels pride themselves on how democratically the IIP is run. The IIP's organization contrasts sharply with the lack of organization found in newer, personality-driven Sunni parties like the National Dialogue Council and the Conference of Iraqi People. Its highest authority is its Shura (Consultative) Council, which consists of 100 members who decide the party's most serious issues. IIP founding member and figurehead Muhsin Abdal Hamid heads the Shura Council, which last met in approximately July 2006. Tariq al-Hashimi is the Secretary General of the party, but he cannot act without the approval of the Political Bureau. The Political Bureau is the party's day-to-day leadership and meets as often as necessary, ranging from three times per day to three times per week, according to Political Bureau members. Departments prepare

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issues for the Political Bureau to discuss, and the Bureau gives directions and guidance to the IIP offices throughout the country. Approximately 150 to 200 senior IIP members meet every Thursday at the party headquarters to discuss policy and the party's direction.

¶5. (C) The Political Bureau members and their area of responsibility are Deputy Secretary General Ayad Samarraie (political affairs), Assistant Secretary General Ziad al-Ani (administrative affairs), Alaa Makki (parliamentary affairs), Abdal Karim Samarraie (security affairs), Omar Abdal Sittar (internal IIP organizational issues), Nasir al-Ani (relations with other political parties), Mustafa al-Ani (training and capacity building), Amar Wajeeh (media and political planning), Mamoun al-Duri (election planning), Hamid Mubarak (Governmental Affairs), and Osama Tikriti. According to Makki, Tikriti does not have an area of responsibility because he is preparing to replace Mahmoud al-Mashhadani as the Speaker of the CoR.

¶6. (C) (Note: This is not the first time Poloffs have heard that the IIP wants Tikriti to replace Mashhadani. Makki did not give Poloffs a timeframe for when he thought Mashhadani would be replaced, but he implied it would be part of a broader cabinet reshuffle because the IIP would have to give Mashhadani's party, the National Dialogue Council, an IIP ministerial post in return for the Speaker position. End Note.)

¶7. (C) The IIP has its headquarters in the Yarmouk neighborhood of Baghdad. Yarmouk is an AQI hotbed and frequent site of MNF-I and IA raids, and an attack occurred in January on workers from the National Democratic Institute as they were leaving the IIP headquarters there. According to Makki, there are eight main centers for the party, which are in Karkh (in Baghdad), Rusafa (in Baghdad), Diyala, Anbar, Salah ad Din, Mosul, Basra, and Ninewa. The party is probably strongest in Baghdad and Diyala, and PRT members report it is unpopular in Anbar. Each province has an 11-member council that guides the party's activities there.

There are 28 branches that fall below the centers in the IIP hierarchy. The branches are mostly in the Sunni-dominated provinces, although there are branches in Basra, Diwaniyah, and Nasiriyah. The branches are divided into sections of 50 to 150 members, and there are 350 sections in total.

¶8. (C) The bulk of the IIP,s members are approximately age 35 and younger. These younger members form the backbone of the party,s activities. The IIP's branches for youth operate under the name the Union of Iraqi Youth and have eight offices across Iraq, to include Baghdad, Hillah, Mosul, Anbar, Diyala, Tikrit, and Samarra.

IIP History

¶9. (C) The IIP was founded in 1960. It was organized clandestinely and operated in secrecy from the start of the Saddam regime. Mustafa al-Ani, a member of the IIP's Political Bureau, joined the party in 1980 as a freshman in college. At that time, he said, the IIP was organized in groups of three to five members who would discreetly meet to discuss politics and Islamic thought. Mustafa al-Ani, the Political Bureau member responsible for training and capacity, said that under Saddam, IIP members discussed not only how to live their lives in accordance with sharia, but also a wide variety of political movements, from communism to Charles de Gaulle's writings. Because the party was suppressed by Saddam, many of its leaders were regularly arrested and a number of party members fled the country. Communication between those inside and outside the country was especially difficult.

¶10. (C) 1991 was a turning point for the IIP because Saddam, sensing a resurgence of religious sentiment in the country, relaxed restrictions on religious movements in a move to increase his popularity. Under these relaxed restrictions, the IIP was able to turn social gatherings into political meetings. Also in 1991, Osama Tikriti and Ayad Samarraie founded an IIP branch in Manchester, where they started a newspaper called Dar al-Salaam (House of Peace).

¶11. (C) Mustafa al-Ani described 2003 as an "exhilarating and scary" year for the IIP. He said the sudden freedom to operate was a shock for the party, and the older generation of leadership, led by Muhsin Abd al-Hamid, decided from the start to enter politics by participating in the Governing Council. In 2004 and 2005, the IIP held public events and actively recruited at colleges, with its membership steadily growing. Mustafa al-Ani said the IIP decided not to run in the election in January 2005 because it sensed its constituency had not accepted the political process yet and

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would not vote.

Endorsing the Constitution

¶12. (C) Mustafa al-Ani opined that the IIP's decision to endorse the constitution in October 2005 was the correct one, even though the move was politically unpopular. Younger IIP members told poloffs that, because they trusted the party leadership, they agreed to change course at the last minute and urge the IIP constituency to vote "yes". They argued that it took great political courage for the party to make such an about face at the last minute. Despite the backlash the party has experienced, the young IIP members poloffs spoke to agreed that endorsing the constitution was the right decision. They were concerned, however, that the review process (upon which IIP acceptance of the constitution was predicated) was moving slow.

¶13. (C) Ani said there was a "freeze" in the party's membership rank after it made the decision to endorse the constitution, with a sharp decrease in the rate of new memberships. IIP member Salim Jabbouri said in early March that he thought the IIP's popularity was increasing because the Sunni street is starting to see the IIP was right for making these hard decisions and for endorsing the political process. The younger IIP members poloofs spoke to said their once widespread and high profile efforts to promote membership in the party and to educate Iraqis about the political process (book fairs, poetry shows, demonstrations, and open meetings) now are constantly frustrated by the security situation and sectarian violence.

Rocky Relationship With the AMS, Supportive of Sunni Endowment

¶14. (C) Alaa Makki said the IIP was a driving force behind the founding of the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS). He said the IIP intended for the AMS to be concerned only with religious affairs and to leave political matters to the IIP. Nasir al-Ani similarly said the AMS started as a purely religious organization that was intended to say what was acceptable for Sunni Arabs. Muhsin Abdal Hamid was the original head of the AMS because he was a professor of sharia at Baghdad University. Makki said that when the AMS took on a political tone and differed from the IIP's policies, many IIP members in the AMS suspended their participation in the AMS. Makki added that the IIP members continue to try to push the AMS to move its views on politics and the Coalition closer to the views of the IIP, and opinions were mixed on whether Harith Al-Dari had any intention of playing a constructive role.

¶15. (C) The IIP's Department of Call and Guidance focuses on religious issues and liaises with the Sunni Endowment, the official government organization that oversees the administrative and financial affairs and maintenance of Sunni mosques in Iraq. The Department of Call and Guidance encourages the Endowment to support a moderate understanding of Islam. It also holds public meetings explaining the benefits of political participation and holds conferences with imams to ask for religious justification for political participation. The IIP has a network of imams who bring their followers into the party and advocate for the party in their Friday sermons.

The IIP in 2007 and Beyond

¶16. (C) The IIP is working to adapt to the realities of the new Iraq. It is the only Iraqi exile party that has changed its leadership since coming to power in 2003 (with the exception of SCIRI, whose leader was assassinated.) The younger generation of the party (which includes Mustafa al-Ani, Mamun al-Duri, and Dr. Amar Wajeeh from the Political Bureau) has pushed for the party to adopt a pyramid structure and to focus on activities that target younger membership, such as vocational training and recruiting. Salim al-Jabbouri, aged 36 and the Embassy's primary interlocutor on legislative issues, noted the importance of this younger generation because the older generation has been largely focused on governing since 2005.

¶17. (C) The IIP is actively focused on recruiting and training its new members. Alumni return to their universities and holds meetings where they present the

professionals (especially engineers, doctors, and other intellectual elites) and women. A separate tribes office focuses on attracting heads of tribes to the party in order to win the whole tribe over to the party. The party's newspaper (Dar as-Salaam), its website (www.iraqiparty.com), and its television station (Baghdad TV) also publicize the party and its activities. The party holds training sessions on administrative skills, managerial skills, and strategic planning for its members, and while it does not yet have the capacity to organize training on political issues like federalism, its leaders hope to develop its own cadre of experts on these and other issues.

IIP At the Forefront in a Changing Political Landscape

¶18. (C) As usual, IIP has taken a moderate stance in the wake of heightening political discussions in GOI circles on a cross-sectarian political bloc. (reftel) While IIP leadership supports a cross-sectarian bloc, Nasir Al-Ani told poloffs that talks had stalled because the Kurdistan Alliance - an important partner in any cross-sectarian alliance - was not interested in participating. Further, Ayad Sammraie shrewdly pointed out to poloffs that the IIP was not interested in an alliance that did not involve some Shi'a Itilaf coalition participation because he felt a government that excludes Shia Arabs would not be effective. Further, IIP interlocutors said it was apparent that figures such as Ayad Allawi and Saleh Motloq, long absent from the political sphere with their respective political blocs in disarray, appeared to be capitalizing on the momentum to achieve their own personal political ambitions.

¶19. (C) Diving deeper into Iraq's political landscape, Nasir al-Ani said the IIP has the best relations with the Da'wa Party, dating back to the 1970s in London. Alaa Makki separately commented that the Da'wa Party and the IIP are likeminded and of the Shia parties, Da'wa is the closest to the IIP's political goals. Ani said that the IIP hoped to have better relations with Da'wa after the fall of Saddam, but "it has not worked out." Ani said he has good relationships with many of the men he worked with in his exile days, such as Hayder Abadi (Da'wa), Fali al-Fayyad (Da'wa), Adil Abdul Mehdi (SCIRI), and Humam Hammudi (SCIRI), but these relationships have not been able to translate into agreements between their parties. It appears that the apparent tension between VP Hashimi and the PM is being mitigated by the outreach efforts of the political bureau in the IIP. Of late, Sammraie and Ani have represented Tawafuq in engaging the PM on issues such as de-baathification reform, the cabinet reshuffle, and BSP concerns.

¶20. (C) When Ani discussed the Sadrists, he drew distinctions among them, saying that some members are educated elites, some are diehard Muqtada followers, and some are rogue members who listen to no one. Sadrism and IIP collaboration is increasing, beginning from when IIP member Taysir al-Mashhadani was kidnapped in July 2006. At that time, IIP CoR members worked with Sadrism CoR members to pressure JAM to release her. Makki said the IIP has been having discussions with Sadrists about the new political bloc and noted that the negative history between the two parties will not prevent a positive future relationship. It appears that the CoR has provided an opportunity for collegial working relationships to develop as well. When members of Deputy Legal Chair Saleem Jabouri's personal security detail (PSDs) were momentarily detained at an MoI checkpoint leading to Jabouri's hometown of Diyala, he called Sadrism Legal Committee Chair Baha' Al Arraji, who in moments got the PSD released. Finally, Nasir Al-Ani characterized Fadillah as a moderate party and grouped the Sadrists, Fadillah, and Da'wa together, suggesting he saw them as better political partners than SCIRI.

Comment

¶21. (C) The IIP presents itself as the most viable Sunni partner for the United States on the Iraqi political scene. Its organization and depth in Baghdad and the Sunni-dominated provinces have always been its strength, but it has lost support for making unpopular decisions that the National Dialogue Council and Iraqi People's Conference did not make, such as supporting the Constitution. Nevertheless, the IIP might be able to overcome the ups and downs of its past. The youth of its membership and the party's well-developed and democratic institutions, coupled with the weak institutional structure and political immaturity of its competitors, suggest the IIP has staying power on the Iraqi political

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scene. Furthermore, the party appears to be a key player in ongoing discussions to form a new cross-sectarian political bloc and will continue to be the strongest advocate for Sunni participation in politics and the government.
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